



Are We Really Professionals

By SFC Tom Antonaccio

Most of us accept the Army's long-standing assertion that its NCOs are professionals. However, we don't always take it seriously. We often view it as empty rhetoric—something a crusty old platoon sergeant or sergeant major uses to keep young NCOs in line.

Nothing could be further from the truth. The NCO Corps is a bonafide professional organization. In fact, it has the same properties as many other professions such as the medical and legal professions.

Two publications serve as excellent points of reference on this subject: Samuel Huntington's "Officership as a Profession," (chapter two in the book *War, Morality, and the Military Profession*, published in 1986 by Westview Press, Boulder, CO) and Air Force Pamphlet 50-34. Huntington's article discusses the issue of professionalism in our officer corps. Chapter six of AFP 50-34 extends Huntington's discussion of Air Force NCOs.

According to Huntington, "An organization is a profession in the special sense when its members exhibit three critical properties: expertise, responsibility, and corporateness." The Air Force subsequently developed several questions to determine if its NCOs exhibited these three properties. These questions, if answered in the affirmative *when asked about Army NCOs* will demonstrate that we are professionals.

Do members of the group have the sort of knowledge and skills not generally found in the population outside the group? Although some Army specialties (administration and supply, for example) are commonly found in every city and town, many are not. Consider the combat arms field or even the skills of a platoon sergeant or squad leader. These jobs are unique to the military. All require comprehensive knowledge of a variety of common core subjects not found outside the military. Subjects such as military leadership and battle-focused training, for example, aren't exactly part of your average high school or college curriculum.

Do members of the group apply their expertise for the purpose of producing something of great benefit to society? The Army, along with its sister organizations, has one major responsibility: to deter (and, if necessary, defeat) enemy aggression. The

NCO Corps has served a vital role in fulfilling this responsibility. NCOs are primarily responsible for training soldier teams, squads and platoons, using the latest technologies. We're responsible for ensuring that our soldiers master the individual tasks associated with collective (METL) tasks. Surely society

has benefited from the fruits of this training.

Is the application of this expertise free from limitations of time and space? Although some of our strategic concerns have changed since the end of the Cold War, NCO responsibilities for training soldiers have not changed. Who trains the soldiers serving at "freedom's frontier" in Korea? Who trains the soldiers who are maintaining stability in Europe? Who molds young high school graduates into soldiers? That's right, we do. The NCO Corps has been the backbone of the Army for more than 200 years. It will continue to serve this same role for many years to come.

Is the expertise of the group carefully recorded in books and does this expertise have a background or history which members must learn? The average base library has hundreds of books, papers and articles on the history of the NCO Corps. Many Army field manuals cover the subject as well. FM 22-100, *Military Leadership*, is a prime example. This manual explores some of the professional leadership dilemmas NCOs have faced over the years. These dilemmas serve as valuable teaching tools at a variety of service schools. They help us hone our own leadership skills.

Does the group create schools for the purpose of imparting this expertise to its members? The NCO Corps has its own Noncommissioned Officer Education System (NCOES) designed to impart the skills, knowledge and attitudes (SKAs) critical to performing successfully in positions of increased responsibility. PLDC prepares soldiers for promotion to the grade of sergeant. BNCO and ANCO impart the SKAs that help us perform successfully as squad leaders and platoon sergeants. Each of these courses provides the most up-to-date knowledge of tactical and technical procedures.

Does the group insist that those who teach in its special schools have recent practical experience in the profession? The answer is "yes," at least as far as what I've seen at the Ft. Jackson NCO Academy. At our NCO academy, the commandant personally interviews each prospective small group leader. His intent is crystal clear—NCO academies want only those NCOs who have demonstrated stellar performance in a variety of assignments and who have the physical and mental prowess to serve effectively as leaders, mentors and counselors.

Does the group have publications that it regularly uses to communicate the latest news to its members? Do they have organizations representing their interests? This question is probably the easiest one to answer. Just look at the number of journals, magazines and newspapers the Army publishes: *The NCO Journal* and *Soldiers* magazine, to name the most obvious. These publications have one major purpose. They serve as forums where soldiers can share the latest news, policies and ideas. Also, let's not forget the Noncommissioned Officers Association and the Association of the United States Army. These organizations represent our soldiers on a wide variety of military issues, from pay entitlement to better housing. They are two of the Army's "political action committees," so to speak.

Are the members of the group primarily motivated by a desire to serve society? Although there are many reasons people might join the Army, many of us remain in the service for one single reason. We feel a sense of personal fulfillment that results from providing an important service to our country. I'm sure some of us could easily find better wages and better hours in the civilian sector, yet we choose not to. Maybe this is why we have one of the greatest military forces in the world.

Do the members of the group automatically lose their status as professionals when they practice their expertise to the detriment of society? The Army has a strict Uniform Code of Military Justice designed to deal with action unbecoming an NCO. The Army disciplines NCOs who don't conduct themselves in a professional manner. Our UCMJ has been quite successful in maintaining our high state of readiness. Just look at the amount of respect the military commands.

Are members of the group self-regulating? Consider the following words in the NCO Creed: "I will not use my grade or position to attain pleasure, profit or personal safety." Opportunities exist to defraud the government. Opportunities exist to sacrifice the welfare of our soldiers for personal gain. Yet, most of us resist these temptations, content with serving selflessly for the good of the NCO Corps.

Obviously I can't provide all-inclusive answers to the question in an article this brief. I'm sure many of us have other opinions or ideas about what makes NCOs professional. However, I think we all can agree that there is evidence to support the Army's assertion that its NCOs are professionals. I strongly recommend that sergeants major and first sergeants add this topic to their NCODP classes—forums designed to promote, yes, professionalism. ■

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